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ABSTRACT

To understand the low employment outcomes for young people with mild disabilities, this study assessed the level of knowledge of Kansas teachers (N=92) of students with mild disabilities regarding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), transition models, and components of transition programs. Major findings included the following: (1) teachers had the least amount of correct knowledge in the subject area of IDEA and court decisions (42%), followed by transition models (43%), and transition components (55%); on the average, teachers responded correctly to 45 percent of the items; (2) there were no significant differences between the knowledge levels of elementary and secondary teachers; and (3) no relationship was found between level of teacher preparation, experience and background, and knowledge of special education transition. Two transition areas identified as posing special problems were teachers' lack of knowledge regarding life-skills curriculum and the role schools play in implementing the transition requirements of IDEA. Results suggest that lack of transition knowledge by teachers may be a contributing factor to the low employment rate of individuals with mild disabilities. (Contains 21 references.) (DB)

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ED 405 672

Unemployment and Youth With Disabilities

Greg Ruediger

Over the last few years there has been a dramatic decline in the number of youth in the labor market. In 1993, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a 17.4% unemployment rate for individuals between 16 and 19 years old. Young people with disabilities also have a low employment rate. Youth with mild disabilities have employment rates 30% to 40% lower than youth without disabilities (Siegel, Robert, Waxman, & Ross, 1992; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1992; Fourqurean & LaCourt, 1990; Kranstover, Thurlow, & Bruininks, 1989; Wise & Cherritta, 1987). Unemployment of individuals with disabilities is costing society millions of dollars in tax revenue and welfare costs.

For students with mild disabilities, much of the unemployment problem centers on the academic training they receive in public schools (Hallahan & Kauffman , 1991). Teachers of secondary students are constantly faced with the decision of whether to stress academics versus vocational preparation. Because their disabilities are milder, many students with learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, and emotional disabilities are able to go on to post-secondary educational institutions, such as community colleges or universities. It is often difficult to tell whether to steer students with mild disabilities toward a college preparatory or more vocational oriented curriculum (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1991). Successful transition of individuals into the community is dependent upon the quality and appropriateness of both the high school curriculum and the transition services that are provided to help the student accomplish his or her goals (Benz & Halpern, 1987). Recent follow-up studies confirm that although schools are attempting to educate students with mild disabilities to enable them to become members of the adult community, a large number have had limited opportunities to acquire vocational competencies (Hasazi & Clark, 1988).

As a result of these concerns, Congress enacted several pieces of legislation to provide greater vocational opportunities for young adults. Specifically, the 1983 Amendments to the

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Education of the Handicapped Act authorized funding for the support of model demonstration programs to strengthen and coordinate education, training, and related services to assist youth with disabilities in the transition from school to adult life. Another earlier piece of important legislation, the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, included a provision that required that all students with disabilities and their parents be informed of the programs offered through vocational education and the accompanying entry requirements prior to the beginning of the ninth grade. In addition, the Act stipulated that counseling services be provided to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities as well as adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment and facilities. Finally the Act required local vocational educational programs to assure equal access to the full range of vocational program modifications for students with disabling conditions (Cobb & Larkin, 1985).

The Education of the Handicapped (EHA) Amendments of 1990 added transition to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Transition services were defined as: a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed with an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (Sec. 602 (a) (18)). The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Sec. 602 (a) (19)). Each individual education plan is required to have a statement of the needed transition services for students beginning no later than age 16 and annually thereafter (and, when determined appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or linkages (or both) before the student leaves the school setting (Sec. 602 (a) (20).

Currently, very little information exists on the nature and extent of State and local implementation of the transition requirements of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (Federal Register, July 7, 1993). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to assess the level of knowledge teachers have regarding IDEA, transition models, and components of transition programs. Results of the current study along with other transition research may result in the development of innovative ideas to change transition policies, programs, and university teacher training programs.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from 1281 public elementary and secondary teachers of students with mild disabilities in the state of Kansas. A random sample of 150 teachers was selected from the 1993-1994 Kansas Department of Education Public School data bank. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the respondents.

Insert Table 1 about here

Construction and Validation of Transition Questionnaire

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire composed of two sections. The first section included items concerning personal characteristics and professional background, presented in fixed-response or free-response formats. The second section contained items that measured transition knowledge. The transition items were presented in the fixed-response, multiple choice format. The 14 multiple-choice items sampled important aspects of the federal laws, transition programs, and community resources that effect special education students. Items were written to establish knowledge of (a) IDEA, and the Supreme Court's interpretation of its substantive provisions; (b) transition models; (c) components of transition programs. The transition score, assigned on the basis of total correct responses was used as the dependent variable for this

investigation.

The transition questions were developed from an item specification table. Content areas, listed previously, were selected on the basis of representation in two current textbooks, Brolin's Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) Curriculum Program (1992), and Clark and Kolstoe's Career Development and Transition Education for Adolescents With Disabilities (1990). Additional consideration was given to current transition issues which have appeared in the literature since publication of the two texts. The transition items were then sent to five special education transition experts for review. The transition experts were (a) requested to read the transition items for clarity and content, (b) asked to judge the representativeness of the sample, and (c) invited to suggest improvements. The nature of the study was disclosed to the experts, and they were asked to validate the content of individual items as well as the overall instrument based upon their knowledge of special education transition. Following this content validation process, all of the 14 items were deemed representative of special education transition components.

Prior to using the questionnaire in the study, certain consistency measures were considered. The instrument was administered to two separate groups of graduate students. The first group was made up of students enrolled in a special education methods course during the spring of 1994. The second group included students seeking general administrator certification who were enrolled in a special education administration course during the spring of 1994. Each group was asked to complete the questionnaire on two occasions (1 week apart). Questionnaires were coded to allow matching each respondent's first and second responses. A test-retest reliability coefficient r=.92 was obtained and judged adequate for the purposes of this study.

Using the responses from the first administration to each group, internal consistency was established. Internal consistency is used frequently to provide an estimate of reliability for instruments that will only receive one administration (Best, 1993). Reliabilities of .90 are considered acceptable for behavior science and education applications (Best, 1993). The resulting coefficient of .91 was therefore deemed sufficient to ensure internal consistency. Finally, the 14-

item questionnaire was piloted on ten teachers of students with disabilities and ten school administrators who were participating in graduate courses. Following the pilot study, an item debriefing session was conducted with a psychology professor, special education professor, school administrator, education graduate student, and an undergraduate student. Feedback from the debriefing session resulted in changes to individual questionnaire items. Table 2 lists the questionnaire items.

Insert Table 2 about here

Procedure

Initially, the 150 teachers of students with mild disabilities were randomly selected and identified by school name and address only. Packets were distributed containing (a) a cover letter, (b) the questionnaire, (c) a postage-paid return envelope. The packets were mailed directly to the schools and addressed to the attention of the teachers. Using the school name only to contact potential subjects and numerically coding the response forms allowed the investigator to assure teachers that their identities would remain unknown.

Twelve days after the first mailing, a post-card reminder was sent to each teacher who had not yet responded. A follow-up letter and additional questionnaires were mailed to teachers from whom no responses were received 3 weeks after the initial date.

RESULTS

Teacher Correct Responses to Questionnaire Items

Of the 150 teachers selected to participate in the study, 92 completed the questionnaire (61% return rate). On the average, teachers were able to respond correctly to 6.60 (45%) of the 14 special education transition items. When studying transition subject areas, teachers answered the least number of items correct in the category of IDEA and court decisions (42%) followed by transition components (43%), and transition models (55%).

Eight questions were answered by less than 50% of the study respondents. The requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act impacting transition services, interagency linkages, and individualized education programs were beyond the frame of reference for most respondents. Other observations indicated that only 11% of teachers had knowledge of life-skills curriculum, and 23% of teachers had knowledge of the responsibilities schools have in implementing the transition requirements of IDEA. Among the six questions answered by more than 50% of the study respondents were characteristics of transition programs such as, the role of parents in exemplary transition models, age of transition onset, individual transition plans, and general knowledge of the definition of career education. Each item and the corresponding percent of elementary and secondary school teachers who correctly responded to it are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Comparison of Elementary and Secondary Teachers Responses

An unpaired t-test was conducted to look for differences in the elementary and secondary teacher's responses. A t-value of -1.43 and P-value of 1.557 were generated when using the elementary and secondary mean transition scores. No statistically significant differences existed in the transition score of elementary and secondary teachers. While the overall comparison of teachers was not significant, descriptive statistics provided information indicating that secondary teachers had a mean transition score of (7.027), and elementary school teachers had a mean transition score of (6.35). Secondary teachers exhibited the least amount of transition knowledge in the subject area IDEA and court decisions (42%), followed by transition components (43%), and transition models (55%). Also, elementary school teachers had the least amount of transition knowledge in the subject area IDEA and court decisions (44%), followed by transition models (49%), and transition components (50%). These results indicate that teachers lack the transition knowledge needed to develop education programs that benefit students with mild disabilities (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 about here

Relationship of the Level of Preparation of Teachers to Knowledge of Special Education Transition

An analysis of variance was conducted to determine if a relationship existed between education level and transition score. The analysis involved a 1(position, all teachers) X 3(bachelors, masters, and doctorate education level) design using the transition score as the dependent measure. The observed main effects for position and education level were not significant. No significant interaction was found between position and education level (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 about here

Relationship of Teachers Experience and Background to Knowledge of Special Education Transition

An analysis of variance was conducted to determine the variability in scores among the teachers. The analysis involved a 2(elementary and secondary) X 2(1-10, 11-26+ years of experience) design using the transition score as the dependent measure. The observed main effects for position and experience categories were not significant. No significant interaction was found between position and years of experience (see Table 6).

Insert Table 6 about here

DISCUSSION

The information generated from this study is not positive for special education programs. Only three questions were mastered by more than 60% of all respondents. Eleven questions involving all content areas, assessed by the instrument, proved to be difficult for the majority of the teachers of students with mild disabilities. Teachers had the least amount of correct knowledge in the subject area of IDEA and court decisions (42%), followed by transition models (43%), and transition components (55%). Overall, the mean response of teachers sampled was slightly below 7 out of 14 questions or 45% correct.

Two transition areas which pose serious problems for special education are teachers lack of knowledge regarding life-skills curriculum and the role schools play in implementing the transition requirements of IDEA. Many students with disabilities need an alternative curriculum which focuses on real life skills. Elementary and secondary educators must be aware of strategies of how to use the local community to teach important life skills. Administrators along with teachers also must provide the leadership necessary for the development of community-based transition activities.

While the overall comparison of teachers was not significant, descriptive data indicated that secondary teachers had a slightly higher mean score of (7.03), compared to elementary school teachers mean score of (6.35). Even though the secondary teachers scored higher, it was found that the level of preparation and years of experience of teachers of students with mild disabilities did not impact their level of transition knowledge.

This lack of transition knowledge may be a contributing factor why individuals with mild disabilities have low employment rates, live with their parents, and participate in few leisure activities (Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1992; Haring, Lovett, & Smith, 1990; Neubert, Tilson, & Ianacone, 1989; Richardson, Koller, & Katz, 1988). How can educators develop or change existing transition education programs if they do not have knowledge of the transition requirements in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, transition models, and components of effective

transition education programs? Information is needed for education change (Villa, Thousand, Stainback, & Stainback, 1992; Schlechty, 1990; Toffler, 1990).

CONCLUSIONS

This study points the way for further transition studies. As this investigation was based upon a state sample only, further studies are warranted to determine whether education professionals in the United States have transition knowledge. It is also recommended that specific populations of educators be examined to determine if professionals have knowledge of transition, and if these groups of education professionals have statistically significant differences in their transition knowledge. In depth qualitative analyses with groups of education professionals could be conducted to determine the degree with which individuals have knowledge of transition beyond those identified by items correct on a survey instrument.

Investigations of state department of education transition requirements and university training programs must be conducted to determine if emphases are in place on transition. State departments of education must require administrators and elementary and secondary teachers to complete a transition course for professional certification. An in depth analysis of university teacher training programs is needed to ensure that future educators have knowledge of transition.

Recommendations also exist for individual school districts. School districts are urged to conduct longitudinal studies to determine the post-school success of their graduates. Interviews with former students will help school personnel identify the current status of students and the school experiences that have benefited them. This information will act as a tool to evaluate and improve existing transition education programs. School districts also are encouraged to provide professional development opportunities focusing on exemplary transition programs and practices. Professional development opportunities along with professional collaboration between school district personnel, community service providers, and university faculty will result in the development of new innovative transition programs for persons with disabilities

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Table 1

Teacher Respondent Characteristics

School Level	Number	Mean Education Level	Mean Years of Experience
Elementary School	52	1.73	12.43
Secondary School	40	1.78	16.86

Education Level Code
1 = Bachelor's
2 = Master's
3 = Doctorate

Table 2

Transition Questionnaire Items

1. In your opinion, transition services should be based upon . . .
2. Based on your experiences, transition objectives commonly focus on . . .
3. Based on your experiences, career education includes instruction in the phases of . . .
4. In your opinion, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that transition services should begin no later . . .
5. In your opinion, an individual transition plan is . . .
6. Clark and Kolstoe (1992) discussed life-skills curriculum. In your opinion, they stated that life-skill curriculums should be . . .
7. In your opinion, career education refers to . . .
8. Based on your experiences, exemplary transition models . . .
9. In your opinion, to implement the IDEA transition requirements . . .
10. Based on your experiences, individual transition plans commonly include all the following except . . .
11. In your opinion, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) refers to transition as . . .
12. Based on your professional readings, The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children advocated all of the following principles for providing career development and transition education except . . .
13. IDEA establishes the expectation that the delivery of transition services is not solely a school responsibility. However, based on your experiences, the school is responsible for ensuring that the IEP includes . . .
14. In your opinion, in order to satisfactorily comply with the transition requirements outlined in Section 1401 of IDEA, the individual education program (IEP) team must . . .

Table 3

Percent of Teachers Correct Responses

Subject Area		Percent Responding Correctly To Specific Items E n=52	S n=40	All n=92
IDEA and Court Decisions				
1.	Transition Services	42	46	43
4.	Age Requirements	63	84	72
9.	School Responsibilities	31	08	23
11.	Transition Definition	42	62	50
13.	Transition on I E P's	48	43	45
14.	I E P Team	31	16	24
Transition Models				
8.	Role of Parents	63	73	68
12.	Transition Readings	44	46	43
Transition Components				
2.	Transition Objectives	46	54	49
3.	Career Education Stages	54	54	54
5.	Individual Transition Plans	46	62	54
6.	Life-Skills Curriculum	13	11	11
7.	Career Education Def.	56	81	61
10.	Individual Transition Plan	31	32	30
Average Total Percent of Correct Responses		44	48	45

School Level Code
E = Elementary School
S = Secondary School

Table 4

Mean Score of Teachers of Students with Mild Disabilities

Position	Number	Mean	Range of Scores	
			Minimum	Maximum
Elementary School	52	6.35	2	11
Secondary School	40	7.03	3	10

Table 5

One-Way Between Subjects ANOVA

Source	df	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F
Position	1	.19	.19	.83
Error	17	4.47	.24	

Table 6

Two-Way Between Subjects ANOVA

Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
Years of Experience (A)	1	1.00	1.00	.27
Position (B)	1	3.87	3.87	1.03
Years of Experience X Position (AxB)	1	1.65	1.65	.44
Error	88	330.31	3.75	